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232045Z Jun 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001913

SIPDIS

NSC FOR CBARTON  
USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/10/2014  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN POLITICAL MOVEMENTS MULTIPLY

Classified By: Abelardo A. Arias, Political Counselor,  
for Reason 1.4(d)

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Summary  
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1. (C) Since early 2005, several political opposition movements defending democracy or human rights have appeared in Venezuela, each spurred by an opposition political activist. The organizations include Federacion Verdad Venezuela (Tulio Alvarez), Alianza Popular (Oswaldo Alvarez Paz), Electores Libres (Carlos Alfonzo Martinez), Poder de la Gente (Oscar Perez), and Frente Nacional por la Libertad de los Presos y Perseguidos Politicos (Oscar Perez). One new opposition political party has also appeared. A conglomeration of 10 National Assembly deputies, Polo Democratico has concentrated its effort on protesting the electoral system being designed for the 2005 parochial and National Assembly elections. End Summary.

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Opposition Political Movements  
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2. (U) Opposition lawyer Tulio Alvarez launched Federacion Verdad Venezuela (Federation Truth Venezuela) February 18, 2005, as a democratic political resistance movement that will present alternative legislative reforms to what Alvarez terms poisonous laws and democratic institutional takeovers. Since its inception, Alvarez has been touring Venezuela speaking on the state of justice, democracy, and rights in Venezuela. He is also raising legal objections to the GOV's plans and actions with the international community. In May 2005, for example, Alvarez presented a formal request at the Dutch Embassy asking the European Union to abstain from sending observers for the August elections to avoid validating an election that would not meet international standards, he said. Alvarez has publicly criticized the Carter Center's role in the August 2004 presidential referendum, and called for abstention in the August 2005 parochial elections. Alvarez acknowledges that some opposition parties do not share his opinion and will participate in the 2005 elections. Martha Guedez and Jose Rafael Garcia are Verdad Venezuela's two vice-presidents.

3. (U) Oswaldo Alvarez Paz, former Governor of Zulia State and former presidential candidate for the Copei (Christian Democrat) party, formally launched Alianza Popular (Popular Alliance) on May 11, 2005, as a "new political action instrument." The organization does not have immediate electoral aspirations, Paz said, because Venezuela's problem is not electoral but existential (morals and values). Instead, the Alianza hopes to "rescue democracy from a regime whose nature is autocratic," and defend liberty, justice and property by any and all legal means available. Alianza Popular plans to have a presence in every state and municipality in Venezuela, Paz said. It's directed at citizens who reject President Hugo Chavez's project, but are not satisfied with the response of traditional organizations, said Manuel Felipe Sierra, a Venezuelan journalist and member of the organization.

4. (U) Retired National Guard Gen. Carlos Alfonzo Martinez, still the subject of charges from opposition activities in December 2002, launched Electores Libres (Free Voters) in January 2005. In an early public statement, Martinez said the group would organize primaries and elect local leaders from among neighborhood boards, associations and organizations, to postulate candidates for the parochial and National Assembly elections in 2005. The movement has had little or no public profile other than news about Martinez's on-going case. Part of Martinez's sentence, overturned by an appellate court but again under consideration in the Supreme Court, is a prohibition of his speaking out publicly on political matters.

5. (U) Poder de la Gente is a "citizen participation platform" founded by Miranda State legislator Oscar Perez

(Gente de Sucre) in conjunction with other opposition political and civil society actors, religious institutions, and private businesses. The organization bills itself as a defender of human rights and its goal, according to Perez, is to educate and inform poorer Venezuelans of human rights guaranteed to them in the Constitution so as to achieve "integrated development and strengthen democracy." In addition to the political activists who are its founders, Perez also envisions the organization reaching out to and training community leaders. Helen Fernandez, president of Vigilantes de la Democracia, told poloff May 25 that Poder de la Gente has already trained over 130 community leaders on human rights issues.

16. (C) Perez also spearheaded the Frente Nacional por la Libertad de los Presos y Perseguidos Politicos (FNLP--National Front for the Liberty of Political Prisoners and Persecuted People. Political opposition and civil society personalities like Helen Fernandez (Vigilantes de la Democracia), Patricia Poleo (journalist), National Assembly deputy Guillermo Palacios (OFM), and Milos Alcalay (former Venezuelan ambassador to the UN), support the FNLP. It was launched April 30, 2005, to raise awareness of political persecutions in the Venezuelan population, take the debate into the international arena and design a plan to obtain the freedom of those detained, according to Perez. Poleo, who herself was sentenced to six months, also said that by raising awareness, she hoped to avoid future persecutions for GOV dissidents. The organization is active in Caracas, Miranda State, and Tachira State, along the Colombian border, where controversy about political persecutions abounds.

17. (C) Perez and Fernandez told poloff separately that the FNLP is not openly political, and cannot become political if it hopes to continue counting on the support of the family members of detainees. For example, Fernandez told poloff in late May that Primero Justicia had asked to join the front, but had been turned down because that would "politicize" the organization. On the other hand, the wife of an imprisoned military officer told Polcouns she did not want to be closely associated with the FNLP because of Perez's political interests. Both Fernandez and Perez admit that through the FNLP they hope to keep the spotlight on weaknesses in the GOV, such as the judicial system and political persecutions, by highlighting the plight of those imprisoned unfairly. Police and judicial persecution is something Venezuela's poor can understand and commiserate with, said Perez. The FNLP has made the press through its organization of several marches, cacerolazos, and written public appeals for mediators to international organizations.

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Facing Intimidation  
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18. (C) Fernandez told poloff in late May that the Attorney General's office and the intelligence police have created files and begun gathering information for a possible case on her and her husband. She has been warned, Fernandez asserted, to be careful because "something could be planted in your car at any time." Verdad Venezuela's Tulio Alvarez told Polcouns he also faces intimidation as the appeals court set to review his conviction is being manipulated by the GOV and opposition judges are either replaced, sick or on vacation. Oswaldo Alvarez told Polcouns that he is under surveillance and that intelligence police (DISIP) officers regularly come to his house when he is not there, making inquiries with the guards or his household help.

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Opposition Political Parties  
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19. (U) Three leftist parties (Solidarity, Let's Go, and the Social Democrat Block) united to form a new party, Polo Democratico (Democratic Pole) March 12, 2005. The National Assembly deputies who founded the party say its mission is to defend democracy. Polo Democratico has mainly protested the National Electoral Council's (CNE) decisions on upcoming elections and asked for changes to the electoral system (audit of the electoral registry, protest against electronic voting notebooks, etc.). The party is primarily a conglomeration of 10 National Assembly deputies, among them Rafael Simon Jimenez or Freddy Lepage, who trace their political careers back to the MAS and Accion Democratica respectively. Opposition politician Timoteo Zambrano is also a founding member of the party.

110. (U) Caracas politicians Carlos Melo and Claudio Fermin launched a new movement called Asamblea Popular (Popular Assembly) May 7. The new movement would participate in the August 7 parochial elections, they said. It would capitalize on the support garnered at rallies held over the last four months throughout Venezuela, Fermin said. (Note: Accion Democratica (AD) disciplined Fermin in late 2004 for carrying out initiatives behind the party's back and against its

principles.)

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Comment  
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11. (C) Most of the new opposition organizations define themselves as resistance political movements, carefully avoiding the moniker "political party," and the negative associations that come with it. Most are being launched under the banner of defending democracy, human rights or both. While some Chavista and opposition supporters speculate that the eventual opposition to Chavez will rise from a split in Chavismo, the new political movements also seem to be a rising trend among current opposition political players. The new organizations, however, already face divisions and are trying to attract support from a similar base with similar platforms. The new political parties with announced electoral interests will probably face the same challenges at the polls that traditional parties fear in 2005.

12. (C) For now the opposition remains severely split. Additional political groups to some extent divide further an already divided opposition that has failed to offer an alternative to Chavez that appeals to voters.  
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